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DRAFT REPORT

Addendum

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PROGRAMME QUESTIONS

Proposed medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001

Programme 15. Economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific

1. At its 30th meeting, on 21 June 1996, the Committee considered programme 15, Economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific, of the proposed medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001.

Discussion

2. A number of delegations expressed their support for, and agreement with, the contents of the proposed medium-term plan. They considered that the trends in the region had been well reflected. Some delegations welcomed the focus on the three major themes of regional economic cooperation, environment and sustainable development, and poverty alleviation through economic growth, which are priorities that were highlighted at the World Summit for Social Development. Other delegations regretted the absence of any means by which the success or otherwise of the programme could be measured. Some delegations also stated that the programme would need to be revised in view of the comprehensive review to be conducted in April 1997 of the intergovernmental and secretariat structure of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

3. Some delegations expressed support for the objective related to enhancing regional cooperation in space technology applications and strengthening national capacities in the applications of remote sensing, Geographical Information System and other spatial information technologies, as well as for the objective of promoting the development of interregional and intraregional transport linkages to enhance international trade and tourism.

4. A number of delegations considered that greater emphasis should be put on the active integration process in the region and its effect on the region as a whole. Furthermore, the subprogrammes should focus on subregional and intraregional cooperation in a number of areas. Some delegations suggested that the role of ESCAP in strengthening South-South cooperation, particularly with regard to transfer of technology and expertise, should be highlighted.

5. A number of delegations were of the view that ESCAP should play an important role with regard to the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, in particular by assisting countries and strengthening existing machineries on desertification, as well as in energy matters such as substitution of fossil sources of energy.

6. With regard to subprogramme 15.1, some delegations considered that ESCAP should focus on the activities for which it has a comparative advantage and that other activities should be coordinated at the global rather than the regional level. The regional commissions were not therefore the most appropriate bodies to undertake such activities. Overall, these delegations observed that duplication must be avoided and that ESCAP should not undertake work that prejudged ongoing intergovernmental negotiations.

7. Some delegations questioned the need for further work on technology transfer under subprogramme 15.3. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) had already completed a comprehensive body of work on that issue. The subprogramme should therefore be deleted.

8. Some delegations suggested that subprogramme 15.3 be deleted.

9. Some delegations considered that, in regard to subprogrammes 15.1, 15.2 and 15.3, since Asia and the Pacific was one of the regions with the highest economic growth rate and a number of countries in that region were newly industrialized countries, therefore in the context of South-South cooperation, ESCAP could plan a greater role for enhancing cooperation in the region in terms of technology transfer, know-how, investment and exchange of information, experiences and expertise.

10. Some delegations expressed the view that since Asia was one of the regions most affected by desertification and drought, particular attention should be paid to that matter. The existing machinery and activities of ESCAP dealing with that issue, such as activities under the programme of the network of desertification control in Asia and the Pacific, should be strengthened. It was also stated that ESCAP could play a central role in the implementation of the Convention on Desertification, particularly its annex on Asia.

11. Some delegations expressed the opinion that with regard to energy, ESCAP could also support the activities of its members at the subregional level concerning the substitution of fossil fuel by lower pollutant sources of energy such as natural gas. However, activities in this field should take into account the interests of all countries in the region.

12. One delegation considered that developing a transport system in Asia and the Pacific was critical not only to markets but also for the expansion of trade in, and economic and social development of the region. Therefore, the current activities of ESCAP in this area should continue. Better cooperation and coordination between ESCAP and other relevant bodies, in particular UNCTAD, would contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of programmes. Financial and technological support for the endeavours of both land-locked and transit-developing countries should constitute the priority for ESCAP activities in the field of transportation.

13. One delegation expressed concern that the proposed medium-term plan did not reflect reforms under way in ESCAP, such as those regarding the role of the Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development, and the role of the subprogramme for economic cooperation.

Conclusions and recommendations

14. The Committee recommended approval by the General Assembly of programme 15 of the proposed medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, taking into account the results of the process of internal restructuring currently under way in ESCAP.